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DIRECTORATE OF  
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## *Developments in Indochina*

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State Dept. review completed

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DEVELOPMENTS IN INDOCHINA*(Information as of 1500)*

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## SOUTH VIETNAM

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Military activity increased somewhat late in the weekend and there are further indications that the Communists are strengthening some of their units. A new Catholic political party is seeking government recognition, while the government is sending another Assembly delegation to the US.

## NORTH VIETNAM

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Hanoi is portraying the just concluded international conference in Paris as a "great success."

## LAOS

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Fighting is at a very low level, but the joint commissions charged with implementing the cease-fire are making little substantive progress.

## CAMBODIA

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Combat activity remains light on the Mekong River east bank, while Communist harassment continues along Route 2.

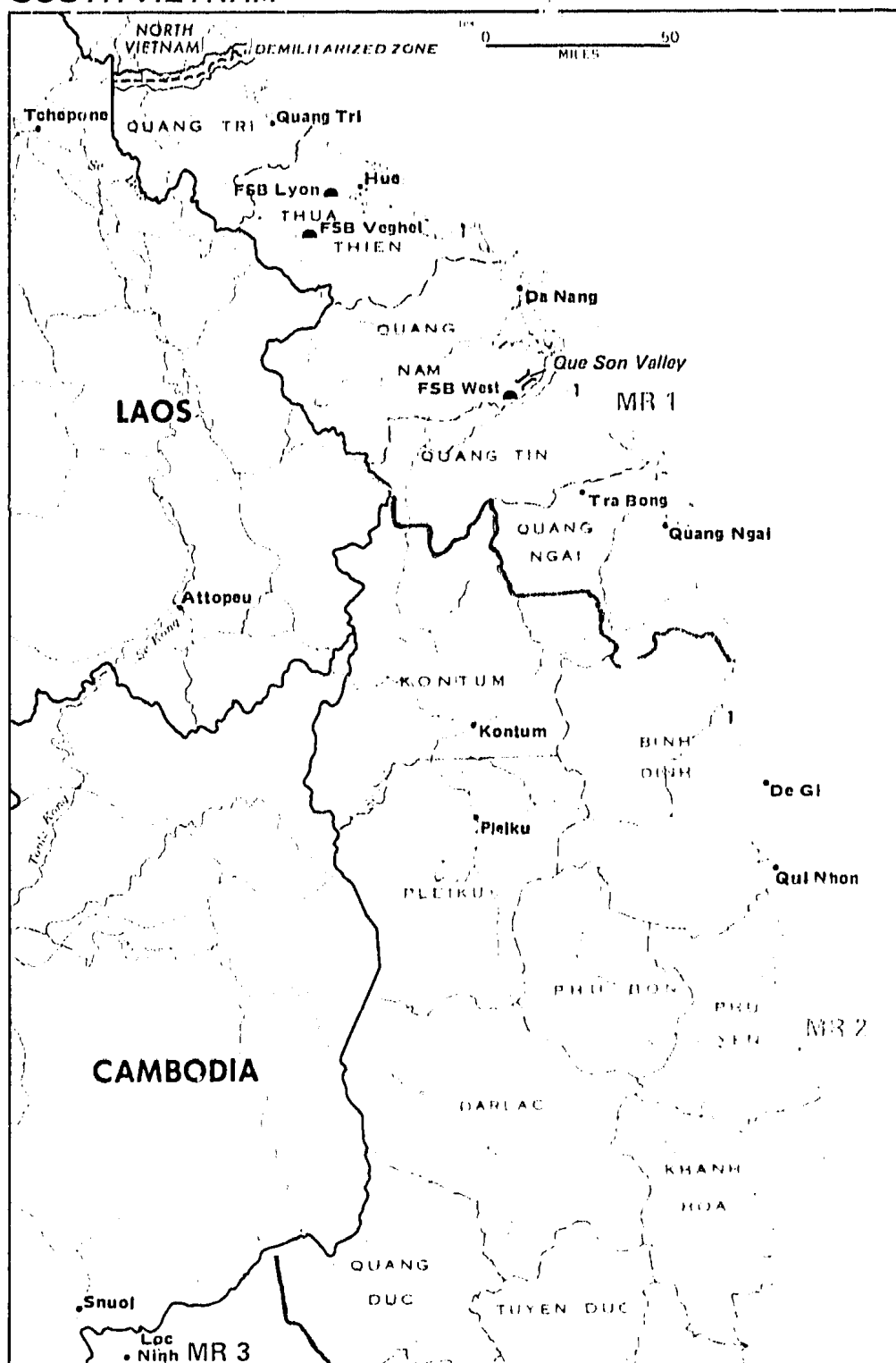
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## ANNEX

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# **SOUTH VIETNAM**



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SOUTH VIETNAM

Military action increased somewhat late on the weekend amid reports that the Communists are strengthening and resupplying several of their military units.

Fairly heavy artillery fire was exchanged between North and South Vietnamese units in northern Quang Tri Province.

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[REDACTED]

Minor skirmishes continued near Fire Support Bases (FSB) Lyon and Veghel west of Hue, probably reflecting Communist efforts to screen the movement of some of their units toward the coastal lowlands.

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Farther south in Military Region (MR) 1, the Communists continue to react to South Vietnamese clearing operations in Quang Nam Province, in part by threatening FSB West in the Que Son Valley. They have also resumed harassing attacks along Route 1 in southern Quang Ngai Province.

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[REDACTED] the Communists are steadily improving their logistic routes into

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southern MR-1. Large numbers of workers were observed making improvements on a supply route in western Quang Tin Province and construction activity has also been noted on a road southwest of Tra Bong district capital in Quang Ngai Province.

In Military Region 2, sharp fighting continued near the coastal government radar facility at De Gi, in Binh Dinh Province but the installation remains in government hands. Road harassment increased somewhat along Highway 1 in northern Binh Dinh and along some interprovincial highways in Phu Yen, Darlac, and Pleiku provinces.

Increased military activity was also reported in the southern half of the country, but all of it was small-scale. There are tentative indications that the Communists are strengthening their artillery units north of Saigon, however. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] recently observed twelve 130-mm. field guns being towed from Snuol, Cambodia to Loc Ninh District in northwestern Binh Long Province. This is the first reported sighting of 130-mm. artillery in the southern half of the country and may indicate that an artillery group projected for a late February arrival in this area has reached its destination. The guns, if confirmed, probably are for units of the North Vietnamese 9th Division operating in northern Binh Long Province and will add significantly to their capability for conducting long-range artillery attacks. [REDACTED]

Freedom Party Applies for Recognition

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The Catholic-based Freedom Party has become the first to apply for provisional recognition under the presidential decree on political parties. The new party is a combination of two small mainly

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[redacted]

Catholic factions--the Nhan Xa and the Greater Solidarity Force--and the group of legislators led by Senate Chairman Nguyen Van Huyen. The Freedom Party has received a strong boost from the influential Vietnam Council of Bishops, which issued a pastoral letter containing a thinly veiled endorsement. Saigon Archbishop Binh, who usually steers the clergy away from any overt involvement in political activities, told the US Embassy last week that he believes the people must have a choice other than merely between the Communists and the government's Democracy Party. He dismissed the latter party as a "meaningless facade."

Although Interior Ministry officials have indicated that the Freedom Party will be granted provisional recognition, it will face an uphill struggle in trying to meet the stiff terms of the decree on parties. The party will have 12 months to meet the membership requirements, but if the Senate elections are held as scheduled next August, the party presumably will have to win the necessary 20 percent of the vote. Despite the endorsement of the bishops, Catholics represent only about 10 percent of the country's population, and the party's chances for survival will depend heavily on its ability to attract non-Catholic support. It is also facing strong competition from the Democracy Party, which already has signed up some Catholics.

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[redacted]

More Saigon Legislators to Travel to US

The Thieu government plans to send another delegation of National Assembly members to the US in the near future, [redacted] the delegation will lay the groundwork for forming a Saigon government lobby in the US, similar to the lobby that Taiwan has had for some time. [redacted]

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the lobby would have to be organized slowly and unobtrusively, so as not to become counter-productive. [REDACTED] the Assembly delegation would contact their American counterparts in an effort to assure continued US aid and to build rapport and good will for Saigon.

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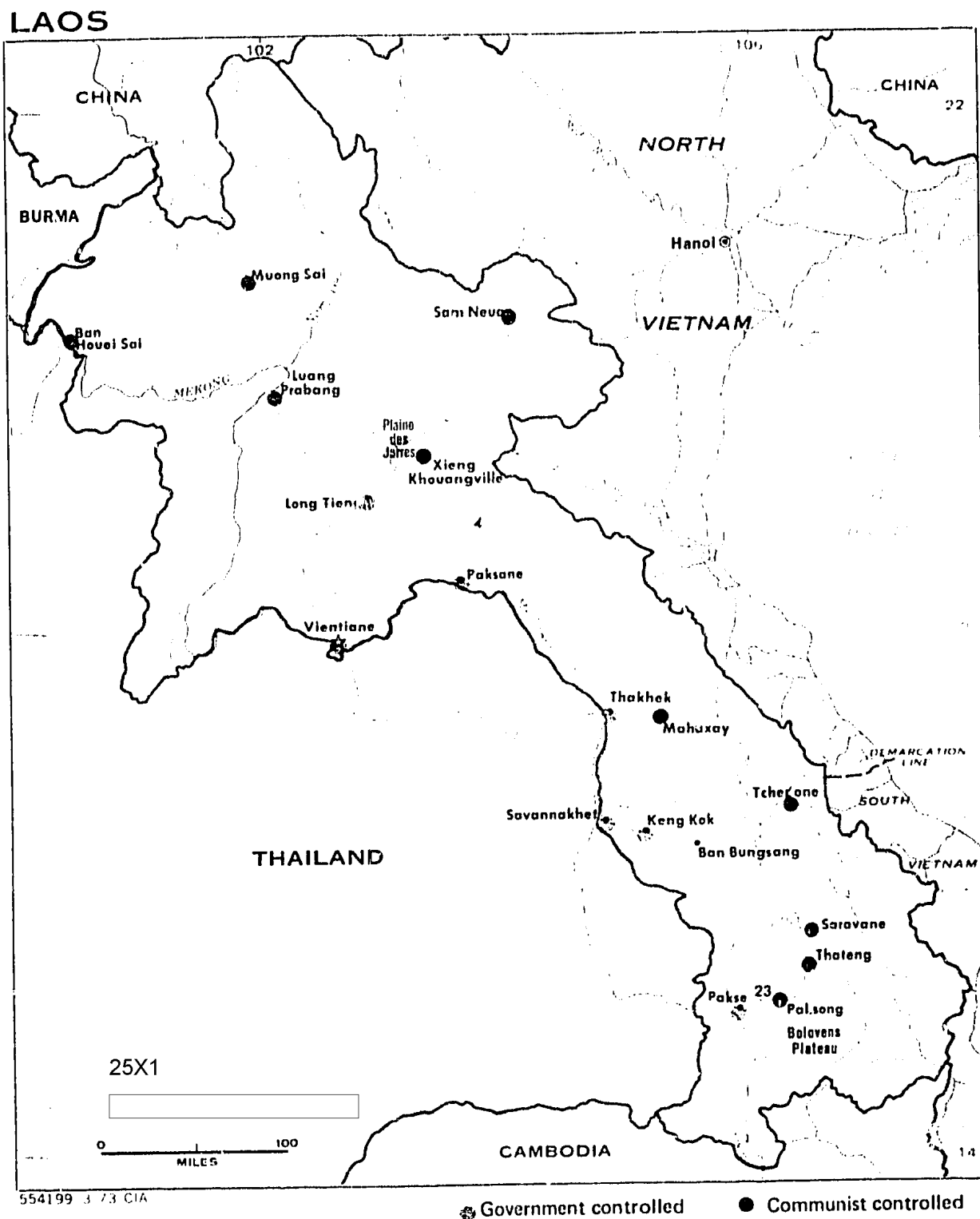
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NORTH VIETNAM

Hanoi propaganda is portraying the International Conference on Indochina as a "great success." In a press conference in Paris on 2 March, DRV Foreign Minister Trinh stressed that the declaration issued by the conference "affirms the principal gains" of the Vietnamese people's struggle "as acknowledged by the Paris Agreement" and enhances the international character of the agreement. An editorial of 3 March in *Nhan Dan*, the party daily, observed that the conference provided a "new political and legal base" for the Vietnamese struggle and was a "correct implementation of Article 19" of the agreement--presumably a reference to the fact that the conference did not establish any new supervisory authority of its own. After asserting that Hanoi and the PRG were strictly complying with the Paris agreement, both the Trinh and *Nhan Dan* statements went on to accuse Saigon and the US of a series of cease-fire violations as well as harassing and stalling tactics.

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LAOS

Military activity continued at a very low level over the weekend with no major violations and only a few scattered clashes and shellings reported. On the Bolovens Plateau irregular troops retreating from the Thateng area skirted Paksong and joined Lao Army units just west of the town. Government and Communist patrols clashed once along Route 23 on the western plateau over the weekend. In the central panhandle, Communist units kept steady pressure on a Lao Army element near Ban Bungsang, some ten miles east of Keng Kok, and shelled government positions southwest of Mahaxay. In the north, small North Vietnamese units skirmished with Vang Pao's troops near Route 4 south of Xieng Khouangville, but no cease-fire violations occurred in the Plaine des Jarres area. As the fighting died down, the number of Lao T-28 bombing missions declined.

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Joint Commissions Meet Again

The joint commissions charged with implementing the political and military provisions of the peace agreement met for the second time on 2 March. Inconclusive debate over procedural points continued at the session of the military commission. The political commission addressed itself the Joint National Political Council and, in markedly cordial discussions, the two sides reached preliminary agreement on the Council's functions, which include making preparations for new National Assembly elections. The ranking Communist representative indicated that all decisions made by the commissions would have to be approved by senior negotiator Phoumi Vongvichit when he returns to Vientiane from consultations in Hanoi and Sam Neua.

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CAMBODIA

Military activity on the east bank of the Mekong River remained at a relatively low level on 2 and 3 March. Government forces continued to consolidate their positions in and around Banam, while Khmer insurgent elements probed and shelled several Cambodian outposts along the river north of Banam and south and east of Neak Luong. Plans to sweep the river bank south of Neak Luong were disrupted when Lon Nol ruled out sending any more reinforcements to Neak Luong.

South of Phnom Penh, the insurgents are keeping up their harassing attacks against Cambodian units scattered along Route 2. Government troops trying to clear several sections of the highway between Phnom Penh and Takeo are still meeting resistance. Some insurgent harassing attacks have been reported along Route 2 south of Takeo, but the government has not yet formed any operations to reopen the roadway from Takeo to the South Vietnam border. [REDACTED]

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ANNEXThieu's Political Machinery Taking Shape

The Saigon government is moving ahead with political mobilization efforts for the cease-fire period. To prepare for the political struggle against the Communists, it is now setting up throughout the country three organizations with overlapping memberships. The first of these, President Thieu's Democracy Party, began to organize in late 1971, but efforts have been intensified during the past few months. The other two groups, which have come on the scene since the cease-fire, are the broad-based "popular front" and the little-publicized "political struggle committees" at the province level and below.

Since the cease-fire, senior government officials have been inaugurating chapters of the Democracy Party in most of the provinces where the party had not already made its public bow. Civil servants and local elected officials, along with the military, are still the prime targets of the recruiters, and the party is largely a government body. Other political parties are losing members--especially civil servants--to the Democracy Party. Some of these parties are still complaining bitterly, but without much effect, about pressure tactics being used by government recruiters.

The "popular front" is holding rallies throughout the country and has been able to gain the adherence of a fairly wide range of parties, religious groups, and local notables. The An Quang Buddhists have not joined despite the presence of several Buddhist senators at the initial organizational meeting. As a result, in one

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[redacted]

northern province where the Buddhists are the dominant force, it appears that the front will consist solely of the Democracy Party. In some other areas, where non-governmental groups have officially joined, the inaugural ceremonies have been attended mainly by civil servants.

Some of the participating groups are only lukewarm in their support. This is apparently due to the widespread belief that Thieu is setting up the front mainly to create an appearance of national unity in the face of the Communist threat, rather than to share power with those who have joined.

25X1 The concern of some independent elements that government officials will assume complete control over the front's activities appears well-grounded. [redacted] local authorities in Da Nang are ensuring firm voting control over the front chapter there to prevent it from taking any action that might embarrass the government. The Da Nang officials do not trust some of the participating parties and politicians, but they nevertheless want to keep these elements in the front as an opposition minority to help counter anticipated charges from government critics that the front is a rubber stamp for the Thieu regime.

25X1 In contrast to the front and the Democracy Party, the "political struggle Committees" will have an administrative and control function rather than a strictly political assignment. [redacted]

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[redacted] Prime Minister Khiem issued orders in late January that the committees be set up at the province, district, and village levels. The committees are composed of key local officials, particularly those involved in police and security matters, as well as some teachers and other members of the school and university community. The com-

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mittees are charged with countering Viet Cong agents and preventing communist penetration of non-communist groups during the cease-fire period. They will also conduct propaganda campaigns to indoctrinate the people against the communists and to emphasize the government's strong points.

On the surface, the three organizations would appear to involve considerable duplication of effort since they are all based on the government bureaucracy and share much of the same membership. They are designed for different purposes, however. The struggle committees are created specifically to counter Viet Cong activities. The Democracy Party is President Thieu's main vehicle for political support, but it is created around disciplined elements and is not designed to attract the broadest possible following. The loose-knit popular front, on the other hand, is supposed to rally disparate elements under the government banner.

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